

## Message Text

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14  
ACTION EA-09

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4543  
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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE  
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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PDIP, PFOR, CH, MY  
SUBJECT: MALAYSIAN REACTION TO DEATH OF MAO TSE-TUNG

REF: STATE 223128

1. SUMMARY. THE REACTION TO MAO TSE-TUNG'S DEATH IN MALAYSIA HAS BEEN ONE OF GRIEF AND ADMIRATION. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, REPORTS THAT THE SECURITY FORCES WERE UPSET AT THE FAVORABLE COVERAGE GIVEN MAO, A REFLECTION ON THE DUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRC AND MALAYSIA. END SUMMARY.

2. FROM FRIDAY, SEPT 10, THROUGH THE WEEKEND, THE PRESS IN ALL LANGUAGES CARRIED THE NEWS OF MAO'S DEATH ON THE FRONT PAGE AND GAVE HEAVY FEATURE COVERAGE, TAKEN MOSTLY FROM WESTERN WIRE SERVICE MATERIAL. COVERAGE WAS STRONGEST IN THE CHINESE PRESS, WHICH NORMALLY PLANS NEWS FROM CHINA MORE PROMINENTLY THAN THE OTHER PAPERS. EDITORIAL REACTION TO MAO'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHINA AND THE WORLD WAS FAVORABLE, ALTHOUGH RELATIVELY RESTRAINED. THE SEPT 10 EDITORIAL IN THE GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED "NEW STRAITS TIMES" (NST) CALLED THE CHAIRMAN "ONE OF THE  
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GIANTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND A GREAT LEADER OF

CHINA," BUT NOTED THAT THE HUNDRED FLOWERS CAMPAIGN "REAPED A HARVEST OF THORNS," THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD WAS A "GREAT FALL BACKWARD IN TERMS OF INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT AND DEVELOPMENT." AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION "THREW THE ENTIRE COUNTRY INTO NEAR CHAOS." EDITORIALS IN THE CHINESE PRESS WERE MORE POSITIVE, BUT WERE NOT ESPECIALLY EFFUSIVE IN THEIR PRAISE FOR CHAIRMAN MAO, AND TENDED TO CONCENTRATE ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS PASSING, PARTICULARLY THE EXPECTED LEADERSHIP VACUUM. RADIO-TV MALAYSIA GAVE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO MAO'S PASSING ON THURSDAY, SEPT 9. HOWEVER, LATE THAT EVENING THE RTM DUTY EDITOR, WHO HAPPENED THAT DAY TO BE CHINESE AND WHO HAD DECIDED WHAT LEVEL OF COVERAGE TO GIVE THE STORY, WAS VISITED BY SPECIAL BRANCH POLICE WHO QUESTIONED HIM INTENSIVELY ON WHY HE HAD CHOSEN TO PLAY THE STORY SO PROMINENTLY. FROM FRIDAY ON, RTM COVERAGE WAS CURTAILED SHARPLY ON BOTH RADIO AND TV, AND THE STORY WAS TREATED BRIEFLY AS A FEATURE RATHER THAN AS NEWS. (ALTHOUGH WE KNOW OF NO OTHER EFFORT TO CURTAIL COVERAGE, A RELIABLE SOURCE REPORTS THAT SECURITY FORCES WERE EXTREMELY UPSET AT THE EXTENSIVE FAVORABLE COVERAGE GIVEN MAO.)

3. THE PRC EMBASSY OPENED A CONDOLENCE BOOK ON SATURDAY, SEPT 11; IT IS TO REMAIN OPEN TWO HOURS A DAY UNTIL SEPT 18. THE MAJOR FIGURES IN THE MALAYSIAN CABINET CALLED AT THE EMBASSY ON THE MORNING OF SEPT 11, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN. ALTHOUGH THE PRC EMBASSY DID NOT ISSUE AN INVITATION TO THIS EMBASSY (A CIRCULAR NOTE ANNOUNCED THE DEATH AND ARRANGEMENTS TO MISSIONS OF COUNTRIES WITH BRMAL RELATIONS WITH THE PRC), AMBASSADOR UNDERHILL CALLED AT THE EMBASSY ON THE MORNING OF SEPT 11 TO PAY HIS RESPECTS AND SIGN THE CONDOLENCE BOOK. CHINESE AMBASSADOR WANG YU-PING AND THE REST OF THE EMBASSY STAFF WERE QUITE VISIBLY BRIEF-STRICKEN BY THE DEATH OF THE CHAIRMAN. FROM OUR RATHER LIMITED OBSERVATIONS, IT APPEARS THAT THE NUMBERS OF MOURNERS FROM THE LOCAL CHINESE COMMUNITY ARE SMALLER THAN THE CROWDS WHO VISITED THE EMBASSY AT THE DEATH OF CHOU EN-LAI LAST JANUARY.

4. COMMENT. THE MALAYSIAN REACTION TO THE DEATH OF CHAIRMAN MAO WAS SOMEWHAT AMBIVALENT: THERE WERE HIGH LEVEL VISITS TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE CHINESE EMBASSY (SOME OF THE MINISTERS, INCLUDING PM HUSSEIN, EMBRACED AMBASSADOR WANG), THE PRESS COVERAGE WAS HEAVY AND THE OVERALL EDITORIAL REACTION TO THE CHAIRMAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS WAS LAUDATORY, BUT THERE WERE HINTS OF EDITORIAL CRITICISM, RTM CARRIED THE STORY VERY CAREFULLY AFTER THE FIRST DAY AND THE MALAYSIAN CHINESE COMMUNITY APPEARED RELUCTANT TO BE TOO DEMONSTRATIVE OVER THE CHAIRMAN'S DEATH. ALL OF THIS POINTS TO MALAYSIA'S DUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH

CHINA AND THE AWKWARD POSITION OF THE LOCAL CHINESE IN THAT  
RELATIONSHIP. CHINA GIVES MORAL SUPPORT TO MALAYSIA'S  
INSURGENCY AND MAO TSE-TUNG THOUGHT INSPIRES THE COMMUNIST  
PARTY OF MALAYA. YET GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS  
ARE CARRIED ON "NORMALLY" AND THE MALAYSIAN CHINESE  
COMMUNITY SO ADMIRER MAO TSE-TUNG THAT POSTERS OF THE  
LATE PRIME MINISTER RAZAK AND THE CHAIRMAN TOGETHER WERE AN  
EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN TOOL IN THE CITIES DURING THE 1974  
ELECTIONS.  
UNDERHILL

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